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ABSTRACT

This study investigated changes in student teachers' attitudes concerning professional ethics as they progressed through teacher education programs. Participants were university students who moved through a series of classes that required increased hours in the classroom with children. They were at 6 levels of educational experience, ranging from freshmen to graduates with at least 2 years teaching experience. Participants completed questionnaires about what they believed the word ethics means, who determines a school's ethics, and the most serious ethical concern faced by educators. About half of each group defined ethics as relating to values, morals, and beliefs. The definition remained consistent as students were exposed to increased hours in the schools. The second largest percentage of definitions fell within the theme of standards and rules. A third major theme was ethics as behavior. Students varied greatly in who they believed determined school ethics. Common themes emerged over all six levels, but a large difference about the responsibility for determining ethics was evident. Students believed that serious ethical concerns facing educators include really helping students learn and get through school, unethical demands from principals, racism and cultural problems, and student abuse. These beliefs varied by students' levels. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

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Preservice Teachers' Changing Perceptions of Professional Ethics as They Experience Increased Time in the Schools

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> The great way is not difficult for those who have no preferences. If you wish to see the truth then hold no opinions for or against anything.
> Seng-tsan, p. 143

> Increasing numbers of people across the ideological spectrum believe that our society is in deep moral trouble. The disheartening signs are everywhere: the breakdown of the family; the deterioration of civility in everyday life; rampant greed at a time when one in five children is poor; an omnipresent sexual culture that fills our television and movie screens with sleaze, beckoning the young toward sexual activity at ever earlier ages; the enormous betrayal of children through sexual abuse; and the 1992 report of the National Research Council that says the United States is now the most violent of all industrialized nations.
> Lickona, p. 6

The last decade of schooling has raised several controversial issues concerning educational rights such as what should and should not be taught in schools. Among these concerns is the problem of determining appropriate educational ethics. Whose ethics should be considered valuable, what role should ethics play in schools and who establishes what constitutes ethical behavior are among issues being debated. Professional organizations across the country and some states are developing codes of ethics and expectations for their members and teachers due to the increased pressure from communities to improve teacher training. Little research has focused on what teachers perceive as ethical issues and even less has investigated preservice teachers as they move through a field-based program.

Terms Defined

"Ethics is the study of standards of conduct and moral judgment; the term also refers to a system of morals of a particular person, religious group, or profession" (Kysieka, 1998 p. 12). Ethics of the education profession should be an integral part of teacher education programs because as many believe and Palmer (1998) has eloquently stated, "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10). Unfortunately, ethical practice has been largely neglected in the teacher education literature (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). Even a cursory review of undergraduate teacher education programs would confirm an apparent neglect of ethical study and practice in preservice teacher preparation.

A *value* may be defined as a general characteristic of an object or state of affairs that a person views with favor, believes is beneficial, and is disposed to act to promote (Barbour, 1993). Values also involve beliefs about benefits or moral obligations that will justify or defend the acceptance of a value. Values are actually human constructions that we project on the world. When a choice is defended in terms of values there are reasons given and general principles defended. Principles of right and wrong in human actions, and good and evil in the consequences of

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actions, constitute the domain of ethics. Ethics are fluid like sand and conform to the cultural shape of individuals and society. Barbour (1993) holds that ethical principals are the intellectual rationalization of emotions that arise from the upwelling of deep impulses and instincts encoded genetically in the brain. Others believe self-awareness and the capacity for reflective choice influence the ethical principles valued by humans.

Historical Overview

Historically there have been variants of the idea that particular acts can be judged "right" or "wrong" according to universal laws or principles, without attempting to calculate their consequences. Some believe that people have a duty to act in accordance with natural law, the rational moral order expressed in the world structure. Some religions stress obedience to divine law revealed in scriptures. Philosophers have debated the evolution and basis of ethical issues for centuries. Kant, a well know philosopher, felt that " right" is determined by an unconditional obligation of rational moral law. Utilitaranism emphasizes social good while others defend individual rights. Simply to assume that any one group embody desirable standards is ethically naive, if not culpable (Lashway, 1999). Rather individuals and professional groups must create an ethical definition that reflects values they support.

The United States was the first nation whose government was founded on postconventional principles of justice, rather than authority central to conventional moral reasoning. Historically at this time postconventional or principled moral and political reasoning was the possession of the minority (Kohlberg, 1999). The Founding Fathers constructed a document designing a government that would maintain principles of justice and the rights of man even if principled men were not in power. Whatever the definition of ethical principles, it is generally agreed that the perception of "right and wrong" is ingrained in most individuals. Every profession has distinct ethical obligations to the public in a democratic society. These obligations include professional competency, integrity, honesty, confidentiality, objectivity, public safety, and fairness, all of which are intended to preserve and safeguard public confidence (Schmeiser, 1995).

Much of the history of education chronicles the way in which philosophers, theorists, and the general public have responded to questions concerning the role of schools in "values education." Johann Freidrich Herbart (1776-1841) maintained that the goal of education was moral education. He supported curriculum expansion to educate the "good person" toward diversified interests and a balanced personality. Herbert was influential in integrating the techniques of instruction with learning, whereby the teacher would address the needs and interests of the students (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998) There was little information in the literature directly addressing the changes in perception of ethical behavior of preservice teachers as exposure to classrooms was increased.

There is quite a lot written concerning stages or levels of moral development. John Dewey was first credited with stating the cognitive-developmental approach to learning. The word *cognitive* is used because it recognizes moral education, like intellectual education, has its basis in stimulating the *active thinking* of the learner about moral issues and decisions (Kohlberg, 1999). It is called developmental because it sees the aims of moral education as movement through moral stages. According to Dewey (1964):

> "The aim of education is growth or development, both intellectual and moral. Ethical and psychological principles can aid the school in the greatest of all the constructions - the building of a free and powerful character."

Dewey proposed three levels of moral development. (1) *the pre-moral or preconventional level* (2) *the conventional and* (3) *autonomous level.*

Dewey's thinking about moral stages was theoretical. Jean Piaget (1948) made the first credited effort to define stages of moral reasoning in children through interviews and observations. He, also separated the stages of moral development into three categories: (1) *premoral stage* (2) *heteronomous stage and* (3) *autonomous stage* .

Kolhberg started in 1955 to redefine and validate the Dewey-Piaget stages and levels. His synthesized levels include:

(1) *Preconventional level:*
- Stage one includes physical consequences of action determines the goodness or badness regardless of human meaning or values of consequences.
- Stage two defines "right action" as that which instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others.

(2) *Conventional level:*
- Stage three focuses on maintaining the expectations of the individual's family, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences. Good behavior is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them.
- Stage four is called "law and order" orientation. Here there is orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of the social order.

(3) *Postconventional level:*
- Stage five emphasizes right action in terms of individual rights and standards, which have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society.
- Stage six defines right by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency.

  Kolhberg contends that moral reasoning is reasoning and that advanced moral reasoning depends upon advanced logical reasoning; a person's logical stage puts a certain ceiling on the moral stage he can attain.

During the 1960s and 1970s a number of psychology- based approaches supplanted the traditional approach to teaching. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg fashioned strategies that link ethical growth to levels of cognitive maturity, moving the student through a range of stages that demand increasingly sophisticated types of moral reasoning. Another popular approach was "values clarification." developed by Louis Raths. Merrill Harmin, Sidny Simon, and Howard Kirschenbaum. This program attempted to assist learners in self-awareness and understanding with a focus on the affective domain of learning.

Morality is not issues only when problems arise but awareness of dilemmas arise when cherished values conflict. Responsibility for individual and social welfare is part of the educational landscape, a daily occurrence manifested in the decision making on all levels of the school and the goals toward which the decision making is directed. Work in a school setting, like any other kind of work, is laden with values and has a moral dimension that emerges from the ethical reflection characteristic of

institutional self-security. Students are vulnerable before and unequal to the teacher: ultimately knowledge is not proprietary but communal, dedicated to the welfare of society through the transmission and extension of knowledge.

Current Educational Context

Teachers in today's schools encounter a variety of complex situations for which they are often ill prepared by experience or individual development. The relationship between teachers' attitudes and values and the environment that supports or challenges them stands as a dynamic dialectic of confirmation and rejection that affects the ethical positions and choices of both the individual and the institution. The distinctive nature of the school ethos affects the values and interests manifested in the school climate and overall effect the preservice or beginning teachers experiences with teaching (Noll, 1999). Educators have long been aware of the influence that "school culture" has on the beginning teacher. The socialization experienced during the crucial first year of teaching often directs the teacher away from university experiences and into the accepted behavior of the school environment. Beginning teachers, often overwhelmed with the now all encompassing job of balancing teaching, counseling, and time restraints, may inadvertently develop acceptance of values in their school culture. Often the process of socialization forces the new teacher to behavioral conformity to institutional norms. Studies from the 1980s found that under some conditions beginning school experiences invoked a perspective that was in conflict with the dominant institutional cultures in schools (Zeichner and Tabachnick, 1981; Johnson, 1981;Tabachnick, 1983;Wells, 1984). However, with increased time in the schools the teachers accepted the institutional culture and exhibited signs of conformity and acceptance.

It is also well documented that the expectations that teachers set for students influence learning. Nearly all schools claim to hold high expectations for all students. In reality what is professed is not always practiced. Either consciously or unconsciously, teachers behave differently toward students based on the beliefs and assumptions about them (Lumsden, 1999). Students who are perceived to be low in ability may also be given fewer opportunities to learn new material, asked less stimulating questions, given briefer and less informative feedback, praised less frequently for a success, and given less time to respond (Cotten, 1989). Most teachers face ethical decisions like this every day and most take their responsibilities seriously because young people are constantly monitoring the adults around them. However, the hidden curriculum influence has a real effect on what students learn. In the area of ethical values, teachers must be cognizant of how their words and actions coincide with the values they profess to uphold (Kidder & Born, 1999). And with ethical decision making, educators must model a balanced, reasoned process based on these intrinsic values.

Most beginning teachers enter schools with high expectations of success for learners and a willingness to experiment with different approaches to learning. Education interns in the UTEP program described below regularly write in journal entries and say that experienced teachers tell the new, energetic teachers that nothing they learn at the university works and often exhibit negative moral belief systems that directly influence the learner. Based on the authors' experiences at five other universities in four other states we suggest that comments and the belief systems represented such comments is not unique to experienced teachers in this community.

"School society" places pressure on new teachers to conform to established expectations and norms created by the faculty-staff environment. This influences how the teachers develop morally concerning their teaching philosophies. The school society environment often influences the development of moral judgment. To what extent increased exposure to the school society environment shapes the ethical perceptions of teachers and how these perceptions effect the moral judgment of preservice teachers should influence the selection of professional development schools. This study is a beginning to attempt to identify changes in perception of ethical issues as students progress through a teacher education program with increased exposure to classrooms.

Ethical Study and Teacher Education

Dewey (1916) noted almost a century ago that teachers cannot be ethically neutral. Schooling is about moving students cognitively and affectivity in particular political directions (participatory democracy) and helping them develop ethical means of problem solving in a variety of disciplines and situations. Similarly, Maslow (1968) noted that we are either forces for psychotherapy or for psychopathology. While this is likely true in all relationships, it is particularly true in the teacher-student relationship where issues of respect and trust are crucial.

Because ethical neutrality is not an option for teachers, it is incumbent on teacher educators to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to study ethics (including various professional codes of ethics), to reflect on, and to articulate their own ethical stance. Schools are contain many conflict-filled situations that often require on-the-spot decision-making. As Corrigan and Tom (1998) note "in a clinical setting. . . dilemmas cannot be avoided" (p. 70). They reason that "education requires a commitment both to doing no harm and to promoting positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes" (p. 71). In field-based programs it is more imperative than ever before that the professional community of educators make decisions based on a core of values. We have a responsibility to embrace and share with those we induct into our field, professional ethical standards. It is only then that "practitioners can move beyond implicit and instinctive moral choices toward explicit, intentional, and defensible resolutions to the ethical dilemmas of the everyday workplace" (Freeman, 1998, p. 32).

Statement of the Problem

Teachers need a clear vision as to what ethical issues influence their jobs as educators and what role they play in modeling ethical behavior for students. As preservice teachers become "school socialized" many seem to change their belief systems and often exhibit behavior that indicates judgment different from their original belief system. The extent to which increased exposures to the school socialization process alters preservice teachers perceptions of ethical issues may influence their relationship and success with learners. This study explores the changes of perception concerning ethical definitions as they progress through a field-based program with increased amounts of time spent in professional development schools. The study explores trends and issues that pre- and in- service teachers believe influence school ethics.

Local Context

El Paso is a bustling urban area of over 600,000 people, more than 70% of who are Mexican in origin. Sitting on the Rio Grande River in the far western corner of

Texas, Mexico, and New Mexico, El Paso has for 400 years been a major passage through the mountains from Mexico to the north. Across the river from El Paso is the Mexican city of Juarez, a city of more than 1.2 million people, and together the El Paso/Juarez complex of more than 2 million people represent the largest metropolitan area along the 2,000 mile U.S./Mexico border. Although El Paso has long represented opportunity to generations of Mexicans becoming Mexican Americans, it continues to be marked by great need. The region suffers from high levels of poverty, high unemployment, and low educational attainment. El Paso's metropolitan area is fifth poorest in the United States. Despite a history of poverty, state and national neglect, and low economic and human resources, the El Paso community continues to believe in the power of education to create opportunity and access to excellence in education. The local schools, both urban and rural, maintain a high percentage of lower socio-economic, Latino, and English as a Second Language students.

Founded in 1914 as the Texas State School of Mines and Metallurgy, the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) is the second oldest academic component of the University of Texas system. Because of its location UTEP is in a unique position to contribute significantly to the production of Latino professionals and to develop Latino leadership in the United States. Fifteen years ago, UTEP served a student population that was over 70% Anglo. During the past decade the university's population has changed to more closely reflect that of the region it serves. More than 65% of UTEP's students are Latino, making UTEP the second largest university in the continental United States with a majority Latino population. In addition to being majority-Latino, UTEP is also majority female, with women comprising 53.9 percent of the student population.

UTEP's Field Based Block Program

Students enrolled at the University of Texas at El Paso move through a series of classes that require increased hours in the classrooms working with children. Classes are blocked with courses from the Colleges of Liberal Arts and Science. At any different stage of the program students are required to work a specified number of hours in the schools. The students in this study were used to establish a baseline were at six different levels of educational experience. The methodology is being piloted in this study to determine possible uses in further studies of this type. The current Block schedule is as below.

INSERT BLOCK SCHEDULE HERE

The student groups are as below.

Group A. Group A students were enrolled in a freshman level course called university seminar. This particular section had an educational theme as it's guiding focus. Most of the students were freshman level, however, there were one or two upper level students. These participants are relatively fresh out of the school environment and retain impressions of their time in the schools before university courses strongly influence their perceptions.

Group B. Prerequisite to admittance to teacher education students must have an intro to education class (TED 2101). Students enrolled in TED 2101 are just beginning to meet requirements for admittance to Teacher Education and have traditionally not been or spent little time in schools. This course brings a variety of school professionals in to talk about education and explain the UTEP program requirements to interested students. At present the majority enrolled are junior level students in spite of the fact it is an intro to education class.

Group C. These students are enrolled in RED 3340, a prerequisite for a course in the Campus Based Block. This course is usually taken in conjunction with a variety of specialization courses that vary according to the students' selected concentration. Exposure to schools is, once again, limited in this group. In this study these students were enrolled in their Campus Based Block. (Please note, the configuration of the Blocks have since changed) This group of students is required to spend approximately 20 hours in schools observing classrooms.

Group D. These students are enrolled in Block I that requires approximately 220 hours of field based work during this semester. The course work includes methods courses and one mathematics course.

Group E. These students, Block II, are in their senior semester and spend about 360 hours in the field.

Group F. Group F students are graduates and have spend at least two years teaching full time.

Students at each level of the UTEP field based program and the graduate classes were given the same set of open-ended questions to answer during university class time. The simple questionnaire asked:

1. What does the word "ethics" mean?
2. Who determines the ethics of a school?
3. The most serious ethical concern educators face would be _____

The questionnaires were kept separate by level of progression through the program. Each set was coded according to themes that emerged from the student's answers and then percentages of themes determined answers were tallied..

Results

Question 1: What does the word ethics mean?

The percentages across groups remained relatively consistent. About half of each group defined ethics as having to do with values, morals, and beliefs. Basically

the definition remains consistent as students are exposed to increased hours in the schools. Interestingly enough, the graduate students used these themes 41 % and the Block I students only 24 % in comparison to other groups that ranged from 45.6% to 58.9%. The second largest percentage of answers fell within the theme of "standards and rules." Again all groups were relatively consistent with a range of 26 % to 30.9%. The largest variation was with the Block I group (Group D) which indicated 46% used the theme of standards and rules. The Block I group split their answers into three broad themes only. A third major third was "ethics as behavior" (acting right) which what 30% of Group D answered. The other groups ranged from 11 to 24%. Other themes that accounted for less than 7% across the other five groups included "the right thing", good and evil, famil/respect, honesty, and knowledge.

Question 2: Who determines the ethics of a school?

The answers to this question were indeed varied. Common themes emerged over all six levels but a large difference as to the responsibility of who determines ethics in schools was evident. Freshman perceived the role belonged to the school board (21%); Group B felt the district/administration (32%). Group C also felt the responsibility belonged to the district/administration (38%). Group D (Block I) decided that the parents/community (31%) was the major influence; Group E (35%) thought teachers/staff; and the graduates (Group F) supported Groups B and C perceiving the district/administration (50%) as the most powerful influence. Outside variables that might influence the students during these semesters include the content of courses taken during the experience, media attention to particular situations, and the school mentor interpretations of events. For example Group D (in this Block configuration) were enrolled in the Critical Pedagogy course which focus on community and parent rights in the schools.

A small percentage of each group saw the principal as the key influence determining ethics in the school. The range was 12% to 19% across all groups concerning the principal's responsibility for the ethical tone of a school. Another theme that emerged was the students themselves as responsible for the ethics of a school. There was a large variance among the freshmen group. Group A thought that the students were 16% responsible for determining ethics in a school while the next four groups in the sequence thought student influence was minimal (3% or less). The graduate students did not include students as influential at all.

Question 3: The most serious ethical concern educators face would be _____?

Question 3 produced the most interesting results of all three questions. Group A felt the biggest ethical concern (32%) was really helping students learn and get through school. Group B (with almost the least exposure to schools) felt that unethical demands from principals (39%) was a major problem in schools. Group C felt principal demands rated only 2% and Block II rated this issue at 11%.
The next three developmental groups (C,D, and E) all agreed that racism and cultural problems were the largest problems in the schools. (Range was 24%-48%) The percentage decreased with more exposure to the schools. It would be interesting to probe further to investigate whether these students became desensitized to this issue, understood more about how schools work, or adopted the predominant industrialized culture. Graduate students rated racism and cultural problems at about 3%.

Student abuse emerged as another common theme across all groups with the exception of Group D (Block I). The range was 14% (Group A) to 23% (Group F). Group D, while in the schools full time and over a number of years felt that

standardized testing, (21%) was an important ethical issue. Part of this response is probably due to the "high stakes" testing enforced in Texas. None of the other groups mentioned testing but have definitely been exposed to the TAAS test pressure in the classrooms during their internships. It is possible that at this point they do not feel directly responsible for or involved in this process.

The graduate students also indicated there might be a problem with cheating (12%) in the schools and teachers showing favoritism (15%). The other groups did not mention these. Other issues mentioned by the graduate students included home problems, poor teacher backgrounds and teacher gossip.

Most groups mentioned violence (range 2%-12%) with an increase as they students moved through the experience. Improper teacher/student relationships were mentioned minimally with the exception of Group D (29%). Block I is the first group to spend increased hours in the schools and these perceptions may or may not be accurate. This question was left blank more than the other ones that may have slanted the answers.

Conclusion

At this point we feel we have established a baseline to guide further studies in this area. The perceptions of teachers concerning ethical expectations and behavior may evolve according to increased exposure but the variables that could influence this progression would be hard to isolate. Closer analysis of the field sites may improve the study. As we progress with this study we would like to select a sample of students to directly track through the program and compare with the general population to determine if the group data is indeed useful for analyzing the ethical evolution of students.

We conclude that ethical neutrality is not an option for teachers, it is incumbent on teacher educators to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to study ethics (including various professional codes of ethics), to reflect on, and to articulate their own ethical stance. Schools contain many conflict-filled situations that often require on-the-spot decision-making. In field-based programs it is more imperative than ever before that the professional community of educators make decisions based on a core of values. We have a responsibility to embrace and share with those we induct into our field, professional ethical standards

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